

The Invisible in Architecture could be conceived as representation. Perhaps this seems self-contradictory: representation is the externalisation of an 'underlying' meaning and as such is eminently visible. But representation is also the process by which meaning comes about. The causes and mechanisms of this process are nowhere near as visible.

The lesser visibility is in no small part due to today's plethora of representation. We live in a time in which representation predominates over presence. People and things seem to be changing more and more into clones from the production lines of the representation industry. Our actions, too, the meeting of persons and things, make way for a surrogate encounter in the domain of representation. True, the technology of representation gives us access to the whole world, but it never lets us intervene. We can say what we like, but nobody hears us. It is as though the world were becoming ever more visible, while our potential for intervention in social and historical conditions is vanishing over the horizon.

In this situation, the sign no longer represents reality. Representation slides into simulation. It becomes a self-referring sign system, as though it were reality itself. It is true that this receives some discussion in the media, but the commodity structure of reality is generally unimpaired. The media do not so much unmask this kind of structure as put it into practice. There are a few people who react against this situation and turn away from the domination of representation, seeking a wealth of experience that escapes the hegemony of the image. They appeal to the three-dimensional experience of space and substance, often suggesting that representation is the very opposite of a physical experience. But image and reality are hard to sunder, for 'reality' is inevitably an image too.

As soon as we speak of representation, we speak of politics in the same breath. Systems of representation are a territory in which countless social interests compete. To a certain extent, it is these systems that generate reality. For that reason alone, it

Representation

is vital to investigate both the interface between the political and the personal in daily life, and the place occupied in this interface by the image. Only when this is clarified will it become possible to devise strategies by which people can relate to these systems – or, if they wish, try to escape them by means of artistic manoeuvres.

Representation is not neutral, nor has it ever been. The problem is that we are now more aware of this than ever before. The link between the word and the thing, between the sign and its reference, which was once regarded as a natural phenomenon, now exists only as an arbitrary consensus. Once there was a strong association among the sign system, the meaning and the action, but the connection has now become utterly tenuous. The system of signs has become self-referent, and those who attempt to trace meanings by philosophical, psychoanalytical or semiotic means invariably find themselves faced with yet another set of signs. In this process of endless semiosis, motives for action eventually disappear altogether. (We may note here that the Left, the traditional holder of the patent on historic breakthroughs, has, in focusing its attention on the sign system, shed its time-honoured catalytic role.)

The disengagement of *signifiant* and *signifié* is the final stage of the triumphant march of nominalism. While for the one this decoupling may be a licence for untrammelled pragmatism, for another it means a ceaseless grappling with a loss of purpose. Representation is recognised as the problem at the heart of the matter, and this has inevitably spurred people to theorise about its rise and fall – from divine presence, to presentation, to representation, to simulation, to virtual reality, to morrow.

Our shift of attention from the action to the sign erodes the debate on the ideological and disciplinary mechanisms that drive us. We thus find ourselves in a paradoxical situation in which the media flood us with information, while the public domain in



which we can act on this information has practically vanished. To put it another way, the moment the system of representation seems to be working at its best (to judge by its profuseness) its social effect diminishes to zero. Representation, in as far as this word fairly expresses the process of obfuscation, has turned against itself. The emancipatory effect of freedom of opinion has degenerated into a cacophony in which everyone is occupied with his own problems instead of with a public concern. In short, the free availability of information has overshot its mark as a social precondition and can scarcely still claim credit for actions that genuinely lead to the improvement of society. To the extent that changes are achieved, they look much more like the outcome of non-public mechanisms, of decisions on private matters in which only a few people are involved. Moreover, those few are often so tied by the system, that the changes they decide upon are more affirmative than subversive. A public arena of this calibre can scarcely be a source of momentum. The ideal of representative transparency has veered around to become a dead public space.

When criticism of the Modern Movement began making itself heard in architecture, interest grew in the problem of representation. Representation even emerged as a key concept of this criticism. In the eyes of many, modern architecture had fallen short in meeting mankind's need for a visible meaning. Its bareness, its blankness and transparency represented only such abstractions as a Better World, Hygiene, Rationality and the like. Hence this architecture failed to mirror a far more complex life-world. In as far as Post-Modernism aimed to introduce change into this situation, solutions were sought principally in the area of representation.

456 Simultaneously, however, this Post-Modernism also broke through in philosophy. Post-Structuralism established the precise impossibility of such compensatory programmes to establish purpose. Some saw it as impossible simply to disregard, in the visual sphere, this crisis of meaning in the philosophical sphere. Thus, within architecture, there arose a tendency that aimed to represent the problem of meaning itself: for even a problem can be a source of inspiration.

Be that as it may, with respect to the two major tendencies of Post-Modernism in architecture, namely historicism and deconstructivism, it is the representation not *in* but of architecture that has burgeoned so enormously. The architectural press has won a completely independent status and makes buildings not only into commodities but into reproducible concepts that receive world-wide discussion. Architects, in principle the makers of buildings, have consequently acquired the status of talk-show celebrities. They live increasingly as ambassadors of the representation industry, leaving less and less time for the actual making. The actual makers stay behind at the office: they are the 'assistants'.

It was a matter of course that there would be a reaction to this dematerialisation of the architectural object. Accordingly, regular pleas are to be heard for an architecture that seeks a way out of this scenography, one that concentrates solely on its own *presence*. We are referring to a movement that aims to react against the prevalent simulation of a reality which, if we do ever experience it as it really is, turns out to be a falsehood. Hence the revival of interest in the building *an sich*, its reality, construction and sacrifices to gravity. It was inevitable: some people have become allergic to signs.

What links the above three approaches is the marginalisation of architecture to a speciality of form. Concern for representation did not grow only out of a critical standpoint towards the modern, but also out of restriction of the craft to purely outward matters. The architect has been driven further and further from the rooms where the programme, the action, is decided. Thus he is increasingly forced to restrict himself to the packaging. The stress on representation is thus also an inevitable consequence of a loss. The architect who hopes to stimulate speculation on the content finds his room for manoeuvre limited to just a few aspects of a building, of which the main ones are the circulation routes and, above all, the façade. This restriction has resulted in a superfluity of expressiveness within a paltry domain. And, what is more, that little domain has been absorbed into the soci-

ety of the spectacle. Doubtless this is why the sublime, that elevated, unrepresentable aesthetic moment that only a Great Artist could achieve, is staged so often.

Three strategies and three architects Representation is an unavoidable subject for contemporary architecture. Meaning has proved to be a process, and if you do something then you influence only the operation of this process, not the cause. In this connection, we once again distinguish three strategies.

Archaism Archaism aims to resist the media-cultivated perversion of the 'unrepresentable'. Its strategy is a pursuit of authenticity. It tries to distance itself from a modernisation process that has come to show features of pure simulation and that has long lost its élan of progress. Thus this tendency seeks its salvation especially in the landscape elements that are not yet contaminated by the virus of civilisation, and also in the 'eternal laws' of construction, foundation, gravity and materiality. The eye is not consoled with beautiful images, but is itself obliged to become sensitive. The image that this generates (some kind of image is unavoidable, alas) is generally bare and sober. Naturally, there really is a representational strategy at work here: the image can only express the wish not to be an image by virtue of being an image. There is no way to avoid getting your hands dirty with the mud of representation. **Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron** balance delicately on the horns of this dilemma. Their buildings, to put it paradoxically, glow with tactile sobriety. It cannot be denied that, as well as images, they are things. But they are remarkably articulate things: they announce their speechlessness with much emphasis. They simulate immediacy and illustrate the iconophobia of the image addict. The architects are exhilarated by impossibilities such as these.

Façadism The architecture of façadism behaves as though it reflects no values other than those it *aims* to reflect. It is intent on a limpid, honest and democratic communication, which is accessible to everybody. The unrepresentable is not seen as a possible subject, for signs make the world go round. This approach comes out principally in the treatment of the exterior of the building, but as an attitude it can also be detected in the programming and even in the way the psychological experiencing of the programme is staged. This always involves the consumption of conventional meanings, without problems and without questions. For **Michael Graves**, this approach comes mainly down to a literal surface treatment, directed at the application of striking iconography and ornament. In Graves, architecture has become monumental entertainment, comprehensible to one and all. If 'comprehensibility' has become the main positive criterion in a complex world, then Graves is one big success.

Fascinism Fascinism is in its element with the semiotic alienation of sign and content. Within this tendency, meanings are never adopted as a way of conveying knowledge but are stripped of their referent and are staged again as signs. The world is a grotesque meaning process in which you let yourself be dragged along in total fascination. The system of representation is an accepted fatality. The individual is no longer in a position to change anything, for we find ourselves after all in an endless chain of representations of representations of... Ultimately, no meaning is definite, and there is no criterion on which a criticism could be based. **Itsuko Hasegawa** shows how far the category that, seen historically, preceded the present condition – the state of nature – has been assimilated into this process. This is not an ecological criticism that attempts defensively to rescue whatever is left of the wreckage, but an explicit display of the representation of nature as a fully-fledged substitute for nature. Nature as sample.

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Ton Alberts & Max van Huut

A wall that has been drawn on becomes a signboard and is robbed of its material significance. In becoming a sign, it loses its presence.

Tadao Ando

In order to conceive an architecture, we talk about temples, columns, triumphal arches, archetypes and also rocks and icebergs.

What we represent is what you represent yourselves.

Ricardo Bofill

In launching the shipshape we were also experimenting with the hyperactivity of architectural media in disseminating the latest form. It was a catchy name and a catchy shape, and we wanted to see how quickly it would be taken up by the architectural world. In this sense I view the experiment as an unprecedented success. More than ever I believe that Function follows Form.

Julia Bolles & Peter Wilson

Drawing and architecture are two different things. Architecture is a phenomenon in itself. It comes more from the world of ideas directly applied to the materials used in building. Graphics intervene: they have now become almost a hindrance.

Santiago Calatrava

Television is the new measure of our perceptions.

Nigel Coates & Doug Branson

Representation is a 'fragment of being' which speaks of ancient, secret rapports with the world, but which wants to reconcile itself with the world, wants to be understood by the world. Representation does not refer to another meaning, but is itself the meaning of this expectation.

Pietro Derossi

It is common practice to try to retrieve experience in drawing, to return a semblance of the third dimension, to embody the quality of light and the anticipation of the material, to suggest the presence of time and movement. We are attempting the reverse; to absorb notational principles directly into the architectural project...

Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio

The very core of the set problems and the way they are resolved will largely generate style.

Norman Foster

The blind walls of the Joan Miró Library give the character and imagery of library, while at the same time supporting the stacks where the books are kept. On the outside, rows of cypress trees form green walls which border the lake and thicken between the waterfalls. These cypresses can be seen as a replica and natural extension, in vegetation, of the stone wall system.

Beth Galí

Gehry talking to his neighbours: What about your boat in the backyard? What about your camper truck? It is the same material. It is the same aesthetic They say, 'Oh, no, no, that's normal'. I am always surprised that other people don't see it.

Frank Gehry

The idea of decoration on a wall – it's pure invention; we don't have to have it in a pragmatic sense. But it might be said that our lives would not be terribly rich without it in a symbolic sense.

Michael Graves

The highly confident and flourishing arguments from the point of view of production for production's sake have called into being the aspects of over-consumption and homogeneity. In order for modern architecture to break through and run past these undesirable aspects to face the next stage, it is thought we must depend even more on information technology to enlarge our imaginations by planning on some kind of 'science fiction' connection of the classical human brain to the peripherals of the 'digital-thinking circuits' called the computer. It is important to bring a fresh impetus to this kind of media environment by continuing to paint universal dreams through architecture.

Itsuko Hasegawa

What else can we do but carry within us all these images of the city, of pre-existing architecture and building forms and building materials, the smell of asphalt and car exhaust and rain and to use our pre-existing reality as a starting point and to build our architecture in pictorial analogies? The utilisation of these, their dissection and recomposition into an architectural reality, is a central theme in

our work. **Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron**

Writing's relation to architecture affords only an uncertain mirror to be held up to evidence; it is rather in a wordless silence that we have the best chance to stumble into that zone comprised of space, light, and matter that is architecture. Although they fall short of architectural evidence, words present a premise. The work is forced to carry over when words themselves cannot. Words are arrows pointing in the right directions; taken together they form a map of architectural intentions.

Steven Holl

Architecture is a medium for communication.

Hans Hollein

Classicism really transcends the limits of any political period or tenancy. And that is why you can revive it – because it is completely independent of political expression.

Leon Krier

In our urban district renovation projects, I deliberately chose to represent a kind of pedestrian civilisation – one which might have prevailed in a peaceful way, without (or in opposition to) the whole superimposed mass of technology, regimenters, subjugators, authorities etc. Naturally, this is just a metaphor, but I make no secret of my feelings about it towards clients and authorities.

Lucien Kroll

Architecture and urban planning must serve to facilitate not only function, but meaning too. Clusters of signifiers divorced from meaning now produce 'simulacres' of meaning or pseudo-meanings, which colour and humanise spaces with humour, wit, speculation, and conviviality. The metamorphosis of free-floating signifiers and 'simulacres' creates realms of 'atmosphere' or 'mood'. These poetic spaces open up not through the recombination of signs, but in stretching ambiguities to the very periphery of sign systems, to the ambivalent interplay of diverse 'simulacres'.

Kisho Kurokawa

Here in the West you see that a lot of people have nothing to go by and seek salvation in formalist solutions. This is reinforced by the architectural journals. You don't need architectural journals at all. They can help a little, but they also distract you from your own route. First you have to look inside and develop what you have in your body and soul.

Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk

True architectural drawings, and those may be rather incomprehensible or more difficult to read, don't have the codes of convention built into them. Let's say, the drawings that are not part of the presentation process are the most interesting because they are not 'present'.

Daniel Libeskind

The work alludes to Roman architecture, but naturally it isn't Roman. However, the authenticity of the image is kept by the reality of the construction. This building is probably not far from what Roman architects would have done... I tried to go about making a Roman architecture in a direct and real way, not by means of representation but by means of strict reality. And for me the problem of realism is connected to construction, to the logic of building itself. It is one of the issues in which I am most interested.

Rafael Moneo

Any analysis ('deconstruction') of the material of architecture may be performed through its documentation rather than through the material itself. As opposed to plans, maps or axonometrics, the perspectival description of existing buildings is concomitant with their photographic record; the photograph can then act as the origin of the architectural image. The perspectival image is no longer a mode of three-dimensional drawing, but the direct extension of modern photographic perception.

Bernard Tschumi

We have said many times that allusion in our work is achieved not through reproduction but through representation. The fake should be easily visible, no more than half an inch deep, and you should sense the shed behind the decoration.

The façade is, where outside and inside meet and where, metaphorically, public and private collide and the community and the individual negotiate. This 'in between realm' of Aldo Van Eyck is the locus for decoration and representation and carries the larger freight of symbolism, being between and part of two aspects of the building. In our work, we both set up this façade and erode it, taking the outside through it, the street through the building. Metaphorically, the highway has gone through our lives and therefore through our architecture. We will never be the same again. The façade is broken; what remains is representation and a thin glass skin to help condition the inner air.

Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown